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ABSTRACT

Teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) are responsible not only for teaching students about the rules of language, but also for encouraging the understanding of and empathy for those who are native and non-native speakers of the target language. Where there is cultural diversity, there is often intolerance, and Taiwan is no exception. A multicultural component has been integrated into an English speech class in the form of a long-term project resulting in a presentation on multiculturalism. Classroom work focuses on problem-solving and communicative skills, both formal and informal, through lectures and discussion of multiculturalism, cultural differences, and cultural tolerance. Results of cultural intolerance in Taiwan's history and potential areas for cultural conflict between Asian and Western cultures are also explored. Formal oral presentations conclude the course. This approach is intended as a practical step in preparing students to understand multiculturalism in their individual lives and in Taiwan's society, and to become proficient, responsible members of the international English-speaking community. Contains 22 references. A syllabus is appended. (MSE)

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Preparing Chinese Speech Students for a Multicultural World

by

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PREPARING CHINESE SPEECH STUDENTS FOR A MULTICULTURAL WORLD

NATHAN B. JONES

Abstract

This paper presents an innovative speech course offered at National Tsinghua University that develops public speaking skills while introducing multiculturalism as a component of oral communication. The paper presents a rationale for the course, a discussion of objectives and tasks, and a sample of the syllabus.

Introduction

On a winter afternoon five years ago I sat at a conference table with 12 of my adult Chinese EFL speech students. The task was for each of us to present orally a human interest story from the news, which we would later discuss. Nothing unusual had happened in class that day, until a woman named Grace began her oral report: "I want to talk about the retirement of the American basketball player Magic Johnson." Hearing these words, the other students laughed out loud, then chuckled to each other as they blurted out the words "AIDS", "San Francisco," "homosexuals," and "Blacks." As a couple of the students later explained, for them Magic Johnson was just another example of an HIV-infected American who acted immorally and deserved what he got.

That an HIV infection of another human being could somehow be funny was chilling to me. This incident helped to

impress upon me how we as EFL teachers are responsible for much more than only teaching our students about the rules of language. We also have an important professional and moral responsibility to encourage understanding of, and empathy for, the people who are native and non-native speakers of the target language.

Defining Multicultural Education

Over the past 15 years much has been written about multicultural education. The term is rather complex and has been defined in various ways. As Tiedt and Tiedt (1990) point out, this concept has often been "the source of controversy and confusion" (p.3). To limit confusion in this paper about its meaning, I would like first to define it according to the general trends in the literature.

Multicultural education reflects reality; it attempts to show how each of us and the world we live in are all, in fact, multicultural (Banks, 1984; Hoopes & Pusch, 1979; Tiedt & Tiedt, 1990). The root of multicultural education is the term "culture." According to Hoopes & Pusch (1979), culture means "the sum total ways of living; including values, beliefs, esthetic standards, linguistic expression, patterns of thinking, behavioral norms, and styles of communication" (p. 3). Like this definition suggests, culture is all-encompassing, reflecting the essence of who we are. Quips Davies (1984), "Culture means being at home" (p.60). Multicultural education, then, expands upon the concept of

culture by suggesting the presence within society and the individual self of several cultures. For instance, a woman may participate in the cultures of an ethnic group, a business, a family, a political party, a church, and a club. By crossing the boundaries of different cultural groups, she becomes multicultural.

Multicultural education encourages people to learn about and to accept different cultural groups (Davies, 1984; Kendall, 1983; Ramsey, 1987; Tiedt & Tiedt, 1990). It recognizes that participation in a single culture is limiting; therefore, to become a knowledgeable, well-adjusted participant of a multicultural world, each person should be aware of how members of other cultures may tend to perceive and behave. According to Tiedt & Tiedt (1990), "We do not fear that which we understand, whether it is higher mathematics, the Amish community's lifestyle, or the history of Korean Americans" (p. 5).

People who understand more about the manifestations of, and the reasons for, cultural differences through multicultural education may then recognize and respect cultural diversity in local, national, and international settings (Gaston, 1984; Tiedt & Tiedt, 1990). It is possible to become, in Gaston's words, "a citizen of the world, searching for universals but also valuing the vitality and variety of earth's cultures" (p. 5).

Another important tenet of multiculturalism is that the concept of education should be reevaluated by teachers and, whenever necessary, changed. Proponents of multicultural education claim that education is never value-free (Banks, 1984; Hooks, 1993; Perry & Fraser, 1993). The syllabus teachers provide for the course, the pictures they hang on their office walls, the textbooks they select, the examples they use to illustrate points, the words they speak in class, and the methods they use to teach vary, reflecting individual values. While there is nothing wrong with the expression of individual values in teaching, multicultural education encourages teachers to explore new ways of viewing and doing things, to recognize that tried-and-true methods and materials valued by a dominant cultural group may not be appropriate in culturally diverse classrooms. Hence, multicultural education encourages teachers to include the values of other cultural groups within lessons and to present lessons in appropriate ways for different learning styles (Banks, 1984; Hooks, 1993; Kendall, 1983; Ramsey, 1987).

Hooks (1993) correctly observes that reevaluating and reforming one's concept of education is particularly challenging:

> As a consequence many teachers are disturbed by the political implications of a multicultural education because they fear losing control in a classroom where there is no one way to approach a subject but multiple ways with multiple references. (p. 91)

In spite of the difficulties involved with reevaluation and change, proponents of multicultural education maintain that the result is a more honest, realistic, democratic pedagogy, one more inclusive and better suited for strengthening a nation's social stability. "It is not hard to imagine," observe Perry and Fraser (1993) "the consequences for a nation when the story it tells about itself, its origins and identity, becomes unbelievable or bankrupt for a significant portion of the population" (p. 9).

Another important objective and defining trait of multicultural education is the promotion of community harmony (Kendall, 1983; Tiedt & Tiedt, 1990). The logic here is that as cultural groups understand, accept, and value each other more, their reasons for fighting will recede and peace will be more likely to prevail. This lofty ideal is reflected by Tiedt & Tiedt (1990), who write, "the overall goal of multicultural education is world harmony, the understanding that will enable us to coexist in the world with diverse people" (p. 5).

Multicultural education is also understood as a process, one that must be continuously developed to help people reach their fullest potentials of intercultural awareness and sensitivity (Gaston, 1984; Hoopes & Pusch, 1979). For Gaston, cultural awareness and intercultural adjustment skills are developed in an overlapping 4-stage process. Briefly, the stages are (1) recognition of cultural differences through non-judgmental observation, (2) acceptance of cultural

differences through the ability to cope with ambiguity, (3) integration with a new culture through the ability to empathize with its members, and (4) transcendence of limiting cultural barriers through the ability to respect the strengths of all cultures. While Gaston's final stage focuses on encouraging respect for the strengths of all cultures, allowance is still made for disagreement and criticism, as no culture has a monopoly in all areas on "the only or best way" (p. 5).

The ideas about multicultural education presented so far in this paper are probably best summarized in the following definition by Hoopes & Pusch (1979). Although several years old, it still reflects the essence of the term:

> Multicultural education is a structured process designed to foster understanding, acceptance, and constructive relations among people of many different cultures. Ideally, it encourages people to see different cultures as a source of learning and to respect diversity in the local, national, and international environment.
> (p. 4)

Focusing on the American experience, they continue by writing, "A basic premise of multicultural education is that in some degree all people, especially Americans, have experienced a variety of cultural influences and are therefore multicultural" (p. 5).

In the next section I would like to point out that Chinese citizens of Taiwan are also multicultural, suggesting that multicultural education has a place in Taiwan's education system, especially in EFL classes.

The Need for Multicultural Education in Taiwan

Taiwan is a complex, multicultural society and its need for multicultural education is no less than it is in the United States. As Tsao (1996) points out, the island's population can be roughly divided into four major ethnic groups. Approximately 73% are speakers of Southern Min (Taiwanese), 13% are Mainlanders, 12% are Hakka, and 2% are Indigenous (Aborigines). Closer examination of these major population categories reveals even greater diversity.

Although indigenous and relatively small in number, it would be a mistake to assume that the Aborigines are a homogenous group. There are 10 main Aboriginal tribes, each with its own language and customs (Tsao, 1996). As for the Mainlanders, they and their descendants are also a diverse group, having recently moved to Taiwan around 1949 from several provinces in mainland China, bringing with them their unique dialects and regional customs. Then there are the ethnic Taiwanese, native speakers of Southern Min from Fujian province of the mainland who settled in Taiwan in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Likewise, they are not mono-cultural. Over the years regions in Taiwan have developed unique arts, crafts, local histories, and political agendas (Wang, 1995; Yun, 1995). The Hakka, too, have a special culture, with a unique Chinese dialect, religious practices, and ethnic history (Yun, 1993).

In addition to the four major, traditional population groups of Taiwan, a fifth one is now emerging, that of foreign residents and workers. Because of Taiwan's strong economy, labor shortages in certain sectors, and competitive wages, people from countries throughout the world have arrived here in search of opportunity. Wu (1996) reports that the estimated number of legal and illegal foreign workers in Taiwan now exceeds the entire Aboriginal population.

It is likely that as Taiwan's economy continues to develop, the country will become even more multicultural. Liu (1995) points out that the central government's plans to develop Taiwan into an Asia-Pacific Regional Operations Center (the APROC plan) will require deregulation of capital investment, shipping, transportation, and communications. It will also require expanding the development of infrastructure for the targeted industries of transportation, manufacturing, financial services, and communications. Likewise, there is the plan to push for Taiwan's entry into the World Trade Organization and for Taiwanese companies to build strategic business alliances with multinational firms. Implementing these ambitious development strategies will require Taiwan's business and industry managers to communicate effectively in English and other languages with customers, managers, and skilled workers of various cultural backgrounds from around the world.

Unfortunately, where there is cultural diversity, there is often intolerance, and Taiwan is no exception. Tsao (1996) reports that in the last 100 years, 8 Aboriginal tribes in Taiwan have disappeared, the tribespeople apparently having given up their own ethnic cultures to be absorbed into the dominant Taiwanese culture. In more modern times, establishment since 1949 of Mandarin as Taiwan's official language by the Republic of China's central government has until recently suppressed the use of local languages and dialects, which has had an adverse effect on local cultures. Likewise, minority groups appear to fear ethnic discrimination. Yun (1993) discusses why it is apparently difficult to count the numbers of Hakka in Taiwan, as many may be reluctant to reveal their true ethnic identities because of potential discrimination.

So far three points emerge from this discussion: (1) Taiwan is a complex, multicultural society and will probably become even more so in the future, (2) Taiwan has had a problem with cultural intolerance, and (3) including multicultural education in Taiwan may help students to overcome their intolerance and to prepare themselves for living in a multicultural world.

Applying Multicultural Education in EFL Speech Class

Setting and Objectives

The setting for the EFL speech class that I regularly teach is the Department of Foreign Languages of National

Tsinghua University in Hsin Chu, Taiwan. Foreign language majors in their sophomore year are required to complete two semesters of English speech class, which meets two hours each week for about 4 months each term.

The second-semester speech class continues to emphasize the more traditional oral training of the earlier term; however, what makes the second semester different is that its content combines the traditional with a systematic, term-long presentation of multicultural education.

The objectives of the second semester are to improve (1) self-confidence in speaking and listening, (2) communication of ideas clearly in small-group, problem-solving discussions, (3) communication of ideas clearly in formal, oral presentations before the whole class, (4) applications of different rhetorical speech strategies for various contexts, (5) comprehension of conversations and more-formal oral presentations, and (6) understanding of multiculturalism and its importance when using English as an international communication tool.

To improve self-confidence in English speaking and listening, the course emphasizes having students actually practice using English during class as much as possible. Teacher-fronted activities are intentionally limited and use of Chinese is prohibited. Although I occasionally lecture to students in English about important concepts and the requirements of assignments, I am careful to restrict these

teacher-centered activities to no more than 20 minutes of class in a 2-hour session.

Improving the ability to communicate ideas in English clearly in small-group, problem-solving situations is accomplished primarily through practice with small-group planning and discussion sessions, in which I might ask students to talk among themselves about controversial topics or plan for a group oral presentation for a later date.

Students improve their ability to communicate ideas in English clearly in formal speaking situations by delivering individual and group oral presentations, three of which are carefully evaluated for a grade. They also participate in at least two in-class debates.

By delivering different kinds of oral presentations for different situations, students receive valuable experience for a range of speaking situations they may later encounter in school or work. They experience how to deliver informative speeches about multiculturalism, impromptu speeches during the in-class debates, and their own points of view in the give-and-take of problem-solving group discussions.

I challenge students to improve their listening comprehension skills by attending the lectures, videos, movies, small-group discussions, class discussions, individual student speeches, group presentations, and class debates. To encourage students to become actively involved listeners, I structure activities whenever possible to allow for

communicative, meaningful interaction. Small-group problem-solving discussions, in-class debates, and question-and-answer sessions following individual and group presentations are particularly helpful.

Then there is the final objective, which is the heart of the course: encouraging understanding of multiculturalism and its importance when using English as an international communication tool. The progression of tasks in the syllabus focuses on helping students to understand better multiculturalism in their individual lives, in Taiwan's society, and in the English-speaking global village.

Course Syllabus

In the first two class sessions I provide lectures and in-class discussions of multiculturalism and the purpose of multicultural education. By class session 3, the students begin to experience multiculturalism by exploring in small-group discussions the cultural differences between families within the speech class and how their individual cultures are unique within the broader community (Banks, 1984; Tiedt & Tiedt, 1990). A helpful activity is to invite students in small groups to talk about the symbolism of different family customs and traditions associated with important holidays and celebrations, such as Chinese New Year and Christmas.

Beginning in the fourth session, the class focuses on the dangers of cultural intolerance. We first consider the unfair treatment of Native Americans by the European settlers

(Collins, 1992). During this session I present one of many documentaries or movies available about the topic, such as a segment of the video series *How the West Was Lost*, and follow it with small-group and full-class discussions. The students are usually shocked as they learn some historical details about the extreme cultural intolerance that Native Americans have endured over the years at the hands of the European Americans.

However, in class session 5, I shift the focus by having the students explore how extreme cultural intolerance has also affected Taiwan's history. We begin by reading about and discussing some of the abuses imposed on Taiwan's population during the Japanese colonial occupation (Hung,1995; Underwood, 1995). Also near the beginning of the term, I organize students into small groups to prepare oral presentations for later in the semester on aspects of the history, traditions, and lifestyles of Taiwan's smallest ethnic group, the Aborigines. For this task, students are required to collect and report relevant information from several sources, including books, journal articles, and interviews. Class sessions 6, 7, and 8 are set aside for group oral presentations about the Aborigines.

In class sessions 9 and 10 I continue to shift the focus more to the international arena by having students explore some likely areas of cultural and language misunderstanding between Asians and Westerners. Hooks (1993) argues that the

process of opening people's minds to recognize and repudiate intolerance may be an emotionally challenging experience, causing some tension within the classroom. While I agree with this point, I have learned that it is still possible--even desirable--to teach with an appropriate sense of humor. There are several good English movies available that attempt to introduce cultural conflict between East and West in an informative, light-hearted way. Two examples are *Gung Ho* and *Mr. Baseball*. After viewing one of these movies, I ask the students to discuss it in small groups, looking for examples of cultural conflict between East and West from the movie and from their own knowledge and prior experiences.

In sessions 11 and 12 the students continue to broaden their exposures to multiculturalism by researching and delivering individual oral presentations on a non-Chinese custom or tradition in another country. I have them describe a ceremony, holiday event, or tradition of some kind, to explain its symbolism and popularity among the people who observe it. I also ask them to consider how it might be comparable to a related practice in Taiwan. These reports are usually interesting and informative. Past topics have included "The Relationships between Halloween and Ghost Month," "The International Economy and Christmas," and "A Comparison of Chinese and Japanese Tea Ceremonies."

For the sake of variety, class sessions 13 and 14 are intentional departures from the multicultural education

curriculum. On these days I arrange in-class debates on topics nominated by the students and selected through a class vote. Students are apt to select topics that focus on their daily affairs, ones requiring little or no outside research, providing them more time to concentrate energies on developing their final oral presentations.

In sessions 15 and 16, the students deliver their final oral presentations: a group report discussing the potential sources of cultural conflict when speaking in English and other languages. I like this assignment because it challenges each group to consider the close connection between speech and culture, and to consider the possible implications of trying to communicate without being culturally informed. Some past topics selected have included "Speaking White English to Black Americans," "Popular Gestures to Use and Avoid," and "Impolite Questions."

Regarding formal assessments of student performance, I determine grades at the end of the course according to a point system. The three oral presentations are worth 50 points each, for a total of 150. Use of teacher evaluation forms found in Dale & Wolf (1988a) help to establish criteria and a systematic evaluation process for each of the three oral presentations. My holistic assessment of a student's class participation is worth another 50 points, which includes consideration of attendance, performance on in-class tasks, and completion of assigned homework. At the end of the term,

a student's number of earned points is then divided by the total number of points possible, yielding a mean that becomes the final grade. (See the appendix for a copy of the syllabus that I currently give to the students.)

Conclusion

In their landmark article on communicative language teaching, Canale & Swain (1980) identify three major components of communicative competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and strategic. I would like to add another to this list, that of multicultural competence. Although sociolinguistic competence is important because it covers the "sociolinguistic rules of use and rules of discourse" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 30), it does not specifically address the needs of non-native speakers of a target language to empathize with the target language's native and non-native speakers of different cultural backgrounds.

Including multicultural education in EFL classes is not a fad. It is a practical step in preparing students to become proficient, responsible members of the international, multicultural, English-speaking community. It is also an important step that we as EFL speech educators can take to achieve a more humane world.

In her plenary address at the 25th Annual TESOL Convention in New York, Mary Ashworth (1991) probably said it as well as anyone could:

In the corridors of power are many tensions, many irrationalities that we, the people, must reduce and clarify. If violence is not to continue exploding around the world, we must ensure that a strong organic life of nonviolence and rationality is alive and well the world over. (p. 242)

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Appendix

Syllabus for English Speech Communication
FL 2024 01

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Objectives

The objectives of the second semester are to help you to improve your (1) self-confidence in speaking and listening, (2) communication of ideas in small-group, problem-solving discussions, (3) communication of ideas in formal, oral presentations before the whole class, (4) applications of different rhetorical strategies for various speech contexts, (5) comprehension of conversations and more-formal presentations, and (6) understanding of multiculturalism and its importance when using English as an international communication tool.

Textbook

Dale, P., & Wolf, J.C. (1988). *Speech communication for international students.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Attendance

The only way to improve your English is to practice. Therefore, regular attendance is very important. You are expected to be in class each day and to participate actively. Students who miss 3 or more class sessions or who repeatedly show up late or leave early will probably fail the course. Those who do not show up to deliver a graded, individual speech or group presentation will receive a grade of 0 for that assignment, the only probable exceptions being for those with a verifiable medical emergency.

Grades

At the end of the term your total number of earned points for all assignments listed below will be divided by the total number of points possible, yielding a mean that will become your final grade. Hence, someone earning 200 out of 250 points possible would receive a final course grade of 80.

3 Oral Presentations: 150 points (50 points each)
Class Participation: 50 points
(includes attendance, participation during in-class tasks, completion of homework, etc.)
TOTAL 200

Schedule

Week 1
Explanation of the Syllabus
Review of Speech Skills
Introduction to Multiculturalism

Week 2
Review of Speech Skills
Introduction to Native American Tribes
Organize for Group Presentations (Weeks 7 & 8)

Week 3
Review Speech Skills
Finding Multiculturalism in Taiwan

Week 4
Review of Speech Skills
Intolerance in America: Video & Discussion on Native Americans

Week 5
Group Preparation Time for the 1st Oral Presentations
Intolerance in Taiwan: Article Discussion of the Japanese Occupation of Taiwan

Week 6
Group Preparation Time for the 1st Oral Presentation
Open Activity

Weeks 7 & 8
Oral Presentations on Taiwan's Aboriginal Cultures

Week 9
Cultural Misunderstandings between East and West: Movie *Gung Ho*

Week 10
Discussion of Cultural Misunderstandings between East and West: *Gung Ho*

Weeks 11 & 12
Individual Oral Presentations of a Non-Chinese Custom/Tradition
Organize for Group Oral Presentations (Weeks 15 & 16)

Weeks 13 & 14
Group Preparation Time for Oral Presenations
In-Class Debates: Open Topics

Weeks 15 & 16
Group Presentations of Multiculturalism's Importance in Oral Communication